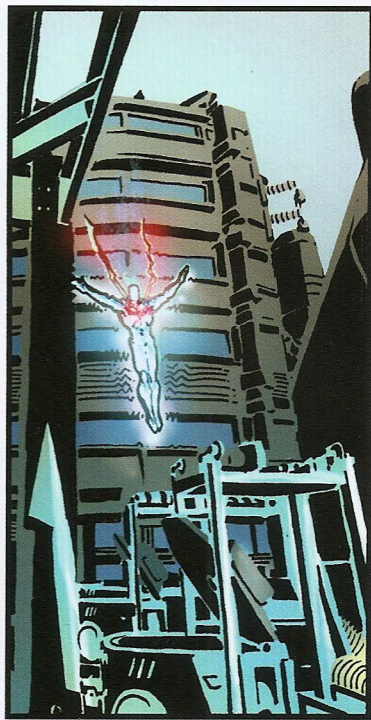






CAPTAIN ATOM

SOMEWHERE IN KANSAS.



I LOVE
WHAT YOU'VE
DONE WITH THE
PLACE.

I'M THE YOUNGEST DOCTORAL
CANDIDATE THAT **DR. MEGALA**
HAS EVER CHOSEN. I DIDN'T
GET HERE BY WORKING
PART-TIME.

WHY DO
YOU MAKE THE
SAME JOKE *EVERY*
TIME YOU COME
HERE?

I KNOW--
YOU'RE COMMITTED.
BUT IT'S A FINE
LINE BETWEEN
DEDICATION
AND **OBSESSION**.
YOU HAVE TO KEEP
A **BALANCE**.

WHAT CAN
I SAY, **RANITA**--
I LIKE
CONSISTENCY.

BESIDES--
I DON'T **LIVE**
HERE 24/7 LIKE
YOU.

BALANCE--THAT **REMINDS** ME.
WHILE YOU'RE HERE, WE SHOULD
HAVE YOU FACILITATE ANOTHER
PARTICLE ANALYSIS IN THE
ACCELERATOR.

OUR COLLISION
RATE HAS BEEN
IRREGULAR.

THANKS FOR PROVING MY
POINT, BUT I DIDN'T COME
TO **WORK**. THIS IS MORE
OF A **SOCIAL VISIT**.

CAPTAIN **ATOM**,
WE HAVE BEEN
ACQUAINTED LONG
ENOUGH FOR YOU
TO KNOW--

AFTER TELLING MEGALA ABOUT MY ENCOUNTER-- EMPHASIZING THE PART WHERE I SEEMED TO TRANSFORM METAL TO DUST--HE HAD A LOT OF QUESTIONS.

I ONLY HOPED HE WOULD EVENTUALLY HAVE ANSWERS.

WAS IT STRENUOUS? TRANSFORMING THE METAL'S MOLECULAR STRUCTURE?

NOT REALLY. AT FIRST, IT JUST STARTED HAPPENING, THEN IT WAS LIKE A SIMPLE *WAVE* OF MY HAND.

THE HAND THAT BEGAN TO DISSIPATE?

NO, PRETTY MUCH ONE RIGHT AFTER THE OTHER. ONCE I FOCUSED MY ATTENTION ON MY HAND, I WAS ABLE TO RETURN IT TO *NORMAL*.

WELL-- NORMAL FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME.

S.N.F.?

THE TWO OF THEM HAPPENED SIMULTANEOUSLY?

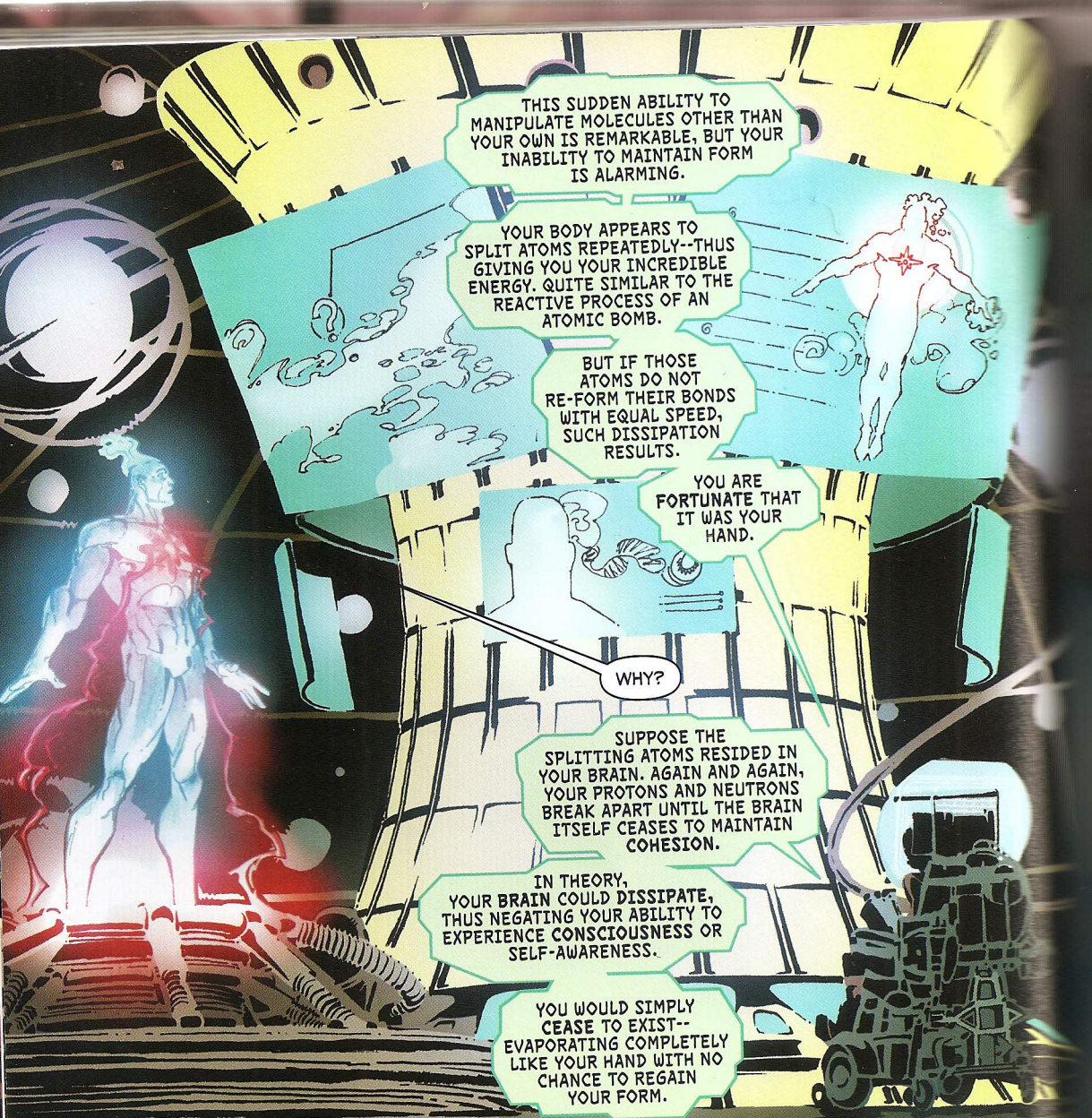
STRONG NUCLEAR FORCE-- THE ENERGY THAT BINDS PROTONS AND NEUTRONS IN THE NUCLEUS. DON'T MAKE ME WASTE WORDS.

WE'VE ESTABLISHED THAT YOUR POWERS ARE NUCLEAR IN NATURE. TAPPING INTO THE S.N.F.

EXCUSE ME. I WAS A PILOT, NOT A SCIENTIST.

REMEMBER?

OF COURSE.



THIS SUDDEN ABILITY TO MANIPULATE MOLECULES OTHER THAN YOUR OWN IS REMARKABLE, BUT YOUR INABILITY TO MAINTAIN FORM IS ALARMING.

YOUR BODY APPEARS TO SPLIT ATOMS REPEATEDLY--THUS GIVING YOU YOUR INCREDIBLE ENERGY. QUITE SIMILAR TO THE REACTIVE PROCESS OF AN ATOMIC BOMB.

BUT IF THOSE ATOMS DO NOT RE-FORM THEIR BONDS WITH EQUAL SPEED, SUCH DISSIPATION RESULTS.

YOU ARE FORTUNATE THAT IT WAS YOUR HAND.

WHY?

SUPPOSE THE SPLITTING ATOMS RESIDED IN YOUR BRAIN. AGAIN AND AGAIN, YOUR PROTONS AND NEUTRONS BREAK APART UNTIL THE BRAIN ITSELF CEASES TO MAINTAIN COHESION.

IN THEORY, YOUR BRAIN COULD DISSIPATE, THUS NEGATING YOUR ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CONSCIOUSNESS OR SELF-AWARENESS.

YOU WOULD SIMPLY CEASE TO EXIST--EVAPORATING COMPLETELY LIKE YOUR HAND WITH NO CHANCE TO REGAIN YOUR FORM.



SOUNDS LIKE A FANCY WAY TO SAY--

USING YOUR POWERS COULD KILL YOU.

RIGHT. THAT.



DR. MESSER, SORRY FOR INTERRUPTING.